



“I Wouldn’t Want to Operate without It”

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**“I Wouldn’t Want To Operate Without It”: The Ethical Challenges Faced by Experienced
Sport Psychology Consultants and Their Engagement With Supervision**

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Abstract

The first aim of this investigation was to explore the ethical challenges Sport Psychology Consultant's (SPCs) have experienced in their applied practice in elite sport. The second aim was to examine the engagement of experienced SPCs with monitoring and supervision of their applied practice. Ten experienced accredited SPCs (8 male and 2 female; M years consulting experience = 21.67 years) were purposefully sampled to participate in individual semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Following inductive thematic content analysis (Weber, 1990), two categories emerged regarding the ethical challenges these SPCs faced, these included; (a) challenges to boundaries; and (b) communication issues. Additionally, SPCs perceived supervision as being essential for applied practice as it enabled SPCs to monitor their practice, get to know themselves and care for themselves. Four sub-categories emerged regarding the exploration of SPC engagement in monitoring and supervision of their practice: (a) supervision is an essential component of applied practice; (b) supervision enabled SPCs to monitor boundaries of applied practice; (c) supervision helped SPCs to feel supported in their applied practice; and (d) supervision aided SPCs to get to know themselves and care for themselves. The place of supervision and peer support should be considered by practitioners working within applied sport psychology.

Keywords: ethics, supervision, elite sport, applied sport psychology

Lay Summary

This investigation aimed to explore the ethical challenges Sport Psychology Consultants (SPCs) have experienced in their applied practice in elite sport; and to examine the engagement of experienced SPCs with monitoring and supervision of their applied practice. Results highlighted that SPCs faced challenges to boundaries; and communication issues in their applied practice. While also highlighting that supervision was an essential component of applied practice that enabled SPCs to monitor boundaries of applied practice, aided SPCs to get to know themselves and care for themselves, while also feeling supported in their applied practice.

**“I Wouldn’t Want to Operate Without it”: Experienced Sport Psychology Consultants
Engagement with Supervision**

The elite sport competition environment (e.g., Commonwealth Games, European Championships, summer and winter Olympic Games, Pan American Games, World Championships, World Cups) is viewed as the pinnacle arena for sports performers and their coaches. For those sport psychology consultants (SPCs) providing psychological support for athletes competing in these elite events, the multiple roles, significant time commitments, and emotional highs and lows they may deal with are complex (Anderson, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 2001; McCann, 2000). For example, the four year Olympic cycle brings with it a variety of unique pressures for the athletes competing within the Games, as well as the SPCs supporting them (Hodge & Hermansson, 2009). “No other sporting event combines so many sport competitions at the same time and place, which creates an unmatched sense of size and spectacle that in and of itself can unhinge even the most seasoned internationally competitive athlete” (Haberl & Peterson, 2006, p.28).

The ethical considerations and challenges faced by SPCs working within the elite sport environment can be numerous and diverse given the range of SPC roles and services provided to athletes in a frequently non-traditional consulting setting (Stapleton, Hanks, Hays, & Parham, 2010). Researchers and practitioners have highlighted the need for ethical SPCs to exercise even more caution than psychologists in more traditional practice settings; due to the variety of service delivery structures, the amount of time spent with athletes/clients, and the situational challenges they face (Andersen, Van Raalte & Brewer, 2001; Haberl & Peterson, 2006). Moreover, Haberl and Peterson (2006) highlighted the burden for SPCs to stay consistent and ethical in their applied practice falls to the individual SPC because of the non-traditional setting of the elite sport environment.

Previous research has provided some insight into the range of ethical dilemmas and challenges faced by SPCs in their applied practice. These have included discussions on: multiple

relationships (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010; Brown & Cogan, 2006), boundaries of practice (Andersen et al., 2001), confidentiality (Andersen et al., 2001; Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010), self-regulation (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010; Haberl & Petersen, 2006), and working with religious and spiritual athletes (Sarkar, Hill, & Parker, 2014). Despite acknowledging the importance of adhering to ethical guidelines, Aoyagi and Portenga (2010) argued that the impact of ethical guidelines are decided upon by the steward of the principles more so than the principles themselves (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010).

One practice to monitor the ethical practice of SPCs is that of supervision or peer support. Andersen (1994) argued that, “The primary focus in sport psychology supervision is (or should be) the appropriate, ethical and, it is hoped, beneficial delivery of psychological services to the client or clients” (p. 155). Aoyagi, Portenga, Poczwadowski, and Cohen (2012) argued that supervision is not just for students, it is an essential experience for ethical effective practice. Supervision is an important element in the continuing education of all SPCs, which will enhance ethical accountability, respectability, and effective quality control (Andersen & Williams-Rice, 1996). In addition, peer supervision has previously been discussed as a valuable resource for practitioners throughout their careers (Borders, 1991). Recently, McCormack, MacIntyre, O’Shea, Campbell, and Igou (2015) reported that frequent use of informal peer supervision provided SPCs with much needed social support while also monitoring their mental health. Viewed as a less threatening approach to self-examination and professional growth than supervision, peer supervision can provide SPCs with support and encouragement when working with difficult clients, when faced with ethical and professional challenges and the isolation of working in applied practice from peers who have had similar experiences (Borders, 1991). Considering the obvious need and benefits gained from continued supervision and peer supervision, it is surprising that there is little published discussion regarding the engagement of SPCs with the supervision process.

While there is limited investigation of supervisory processes used by SPCs, there is a growing body knowledge regarding the related issue of effective SP consulting within the elite sports

environment. SPCs who had provided psychological support for elite athletes during a minimum of five elite sport competitions discussed the components of effective consulting within the elite sports environment (Sharp, Hodge, & Danish, 2014). These SPCs believed that “the key to consulting effectiveness within the elite sports environment was to build a relationship with clients that had a positive impact and which the client was both happy with and continued to develop” (Sharp et al., 2014; p. 86). Furthermore, these SPCs also discussed that to be effective within the elite sport environment SPCs need to (a) fit in, but not get in the way, (b) demonstrate consistent behaviour, and (c) work closely with coaches. Researchers have previously discussed the unique environment and services provided by SPCs working as part of ‘the team around the team’, in high performance sport (Haberl & Peterson, 2006). Etzel and Watson (2006) argued that there is ‘no typical sport psychologist’, due to the unique range of potential clients, the individual relationships with clients, and the non-traditional format of service provision available.

The therapeutic relationship between therapist and client has long been of research interest within the counselling and psychotherapy literatures. However, investigations into this relationship, and how it is monitored/supervised, within the sport context has received limited empirical research to date (Andersen, 2000; Andersen & Williams-Rice, 1996; Petitpas, Giges, & Danish, 1999; Sharp & Hodge, 2011, 2013, 2015). Sharp, Hodge, and Danish (2015) reported that the “sport psychology consulting relationship was found to encompass the purposive, collaborative work of the client and SPC toward making a positive impact while also meeting the needs of the client. The qualities of trust, respect, rapport highlight the “human relationship” or bond between the client and the SPC” (2015, p. 368). The components identified by the experienced SPCs within their study were found to have clear links to the common themes identified within counselling and psychotherapy relationships, specifically; (a) the collaborative nature of the relationship; (b) the affective bond between patient and therapist; and (c) the patient’s and therapist’s agreement on treatment goals and tasks (Bordin, 1979). Despite the variety of education and training backgrounds, and roles of the

130 SPCs involved within Sharp et al's (2015) investigation, the SPCs were clear on the components that
 131 they were required to contribute to the consulting relationship, specifically, honesty, commitment,
 132 knowledge and expertise, counselling skills and professional ethical behaviour (such as seeking
 133 supervision).

134 Accrediting professional organisations for individuals working within sport psychology in
 135 the United States of America (USA) and United Kingdom (UK) have developed guidelines that are
 136 "intended to provide guidance for psychologists and standards of professional conduct"
 137 (<http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/>). Despite variation in these professional codes (e.g., Association of
 138 Applied Sport Psychology 'Ethical Principles and Standards'; American Psychological Association
 139 Division 47 'Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct'; British Association of Sport
 140 and Exercise Sciences 'Code of Conduct; British Psychological Society Division of Sport and
 141 Exercise Psychology 'Code of ethics and Conduct'), their purpose is to assist SPCs in finding the
 142 appropriate ethical path that will help them with the challenges they face, in a manner that suitably
 143 matches their roles and responsibilities and their client's circumstances and needs (Moore, 2003).
 144 Yet Watson, Zizzi, and Etzel (2006) commented that ethical guidelines are only as good as an
 145 individual SPC's knowledge of them and their willingness to adhere to them. We argue that the
 146 effectiveness of ethical guidelines may also be influenced by the individual SPC's willingness to
 147 engage in professional reflection about ethical issues; and their willingness to engage in monitoring
 148 and supervision of their practice.

149 The purpose of the current investigation was to; (1) explore the ethical challenges SPCs have
 150 experienced in their applied practice in elite sport; and (2) examine the engagement of experienced
 151 SPCs with monitoring and supervision of their applied practice. In view of the scant knowledge of
 152 the ethical challenges faced by SPCs and their engagement in monitoring and supervision of their
 153 practice, this study was deemed best suited to qualitative methods. The most compelling advantage
 154 to employing this methodological approach was that it allows a level of depth and complexity when

exploring the ethical challenges and supervision that SPCs engage in -- a level of depth that would not be revealed using other methods of investigation (Bryne, 2004).

Method

Weed (2009) previously argued that authors have a responsibility to be crystal clear about the methods employed within their research while also demonstrating they fully understand the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning their research. With this in mind, the current investigation used a constructivist ontology, which considers “reality [to be] neither objective nor singular, but that multiple realities are constructed by individuals” (Weed, 2009; p. 507), whereby SPCs were given the opportunity to discuss the ethical challenges that they had experienced within their applied practice, and their engagement in monitoring and peer supervision of their applied practice. We also adopted an interpretist epistemology, whereby “observations of the world provide indirect indications of phenomena” (Weed, p.507), which allows the reader to interpret the findings in the current investigation and choose which findings to consider within their own practice.

Participants

Ten experienced SPCs (8 male and 2 female, M age = 50.44 years, SD = 10.04, M years elite level consulting experience = 21.67 years, SD = 7.33, M number of elite sports events consulted at = 7.2 events) who held current sport psychology/psychology accreditation/certification (three SPCs held British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences [BASES] accreditation, five SPCs held British Psychological Society chartered status [BPS], four held Certified Mental Performance Consultant (CMPC) status, and three were American Psychological Association licensed psychologists [APA]). The 10 SPCs were purposefully sampled based on their reputations and having attended at least five elite sport competitions and had provided sport psychology support to elite athletes who were competing at these sport events (e.g., British Premiership [Soccer], Commonwealth Games, European Championships, summer and winter Olympic Games, NASCAR,

179 Pan-American Games, Spanish La Liga [Soccer], ATP Tennis Tour, World Championships, World
 180 Cups). These SPCs had previously been involved in an investigation examining what they believed
 181 to be essential for consulting effectiveness at elite sport competitions (citation removed for blind
 182 review).

183 With the aim of adding credibility to the sharing of best professional practice, all participants
 184 were asked if they would be willing to waive their right to anonymity, while confidentiality was
 185 assured through no direct quotes or identifiable information (such as interview quotes) being directly
 186 linked to any one participant by name. Nine SPCs agreed to waive their anonymity; with one SPC
 187 wishing to remain anonymous. The following experienced SPCs agreed to waive their anonymity:
 188 Kate Goodger (U.K. based SPC; BPS and BASES accredited, had consulted at 3 Olympic Games);
 189 Dan Gould (U.S. based SPC; consulted at 2 Olympic Games and at NASCAR events); Peter Haberl
 190 (U.S. based SPC; APA and AASP certified, attended 6 Olympic Games & 1 Paralympic Games, one
 191 Pan-American Games & numerous World Championships); Lew Hardy (U.K. based SPC; BPS and
 192 BASES accredited, consulted at numerous World and European Championships, former Chairperson
 193 of BOA psychology steering group); Chris Harwood (U.K. based SPC; BPS and BASES accredited,
 194 consulted with British Premiership Football Clubs and on the ATP Tennis Tour); Anne-Marte
 195 Penssgard (Norway based SPC; worked at 5 Olympic Games & numerous World and European
 196 Championships); Ian Maynard (U.K. based SPC; BPS accredited, worked at 2 Olympic Games, 2
 197 Commonwealth Games, 18 World Championships); Sean McCann (U.S. based SPC; APA and
 198 AASP certified, attended 10 Olympic Games & numerous World Championships); Len Zaichkowsky
 199 (Canadian based SPC; AASP certified, worked at World & European Championships, Spanish La
 200 Liga [Soccer]).

201 Data Collection

Data were collected through individual semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with the primary investigator. A semi-structured interview guide was developed to ensure that the same systematic and comprehensive lines of inquiry were followed with each individual while also allowing some flexibility to allow topics to be approached and explored in a variety of ways (a copy of the interview guide can be obtained on request from the first author). Question topics for the current investigation explored what experienced SPCs perceived to be ethical applied practice (Literature has discussed a number of ethical issues faced by SPCs, what issues do you think are the most important to be aware of in your applied practice?), examined the ethical challenges SPCs have experienced in their applied practice (Any examples of ethical problems you've encountered? How have you addressed these?); and examined the engagement of experienced SPCs in monitoring and supervision of applied practice (When and why do you undertake supervision or peer support?). The interview guide was pilot tested with two experienced SPCs to check participant understanding and flow of the interview questions, resulting in no changes to the structure or content of the interview guide.

Following university research board ethical approval, SPCs were identified via purposeful sampling and contacted via email to organize individual face-to-face interviews. Twelve SPCs were originally contacted to participate in the investigation, with 10 agreeing to take part in an interview. Interviews were organized at a time and location suitable to each participant and were conducted by the first author who had considerable experience using qualitative research methodology. Interviews ranged in duration from 70 mins to 90 mins. Each interview was audio-recorded with the participant's written consent. The interviews were later transcribed verbatim by the primary researcher yielding 188 single-spaced pages data in total.

Data Analysis

Data analysis procedures commenced shortly after each interview by the first author to establish if any emergent categories warranted further exploration in the interviews which followed. Considering the aims of the investigation were to explore the ethical challenges SPCs have experienced in their applied practice in elite sport, while also examining the engagement of experienced SPCs with monitoring and supervision of their applied practice, an inductive thematic content analysis approach was employed to search for common themes across all data (Weber, 1990). This approach involved inductively analysing and classifying the information from the interviews, reducing it to more relevant and manageable information units to form explanations that reflected the detail, evidence and examples provided by participants during the interviews.

A number of coding procedures were utilized during the analysis process, specifically open coding, line-by-line coding, constant comparison methods and, memo writing were employed, until saturation was achieved (i.e., when no new sub-categories, or categories emerge; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Throughout the course of these coding procedures there were no pre-determined categories, or sub-categories, instead these were generated from the interview data as themes emerged to describe and explain what SPCs perceived to be ethical applied practice, the ethical challenges SPCs have experienced in their applied practice, and the engagement of experienced SPCs in supervision and monitoring of applied practice. The analytic procedures used within this investigation were not regarded as rigid or static; as Strauss and Corbin (1998) have argued the need for the qualitative analysis process to remain a “free-flowing and flexible creative process, which allows for analysis to be modified until a satisfactory process has been generated in which analysts move quickly back and forth between types of coding, using analytic techniques and procedures freely and in response to the analytic task before analysts” (p. 58). These coding methods allowed the researcher to interact with the data to produce meaningful pieces of information to develop a set of categories and novel relationships which adequately represented what experiences SPCs believed to be essential for ethical practice in applied sport psychology.

Methodological Rigor

With the goal of enhancing the credibility of the research findings, and based on Tracy's (2010) recommendations, the following steps were included to ensure accurate and rigorous findings are presented to the reader. First, a member reflection checking procedure was employed. Verbatim interview transcripts along with the researcher's preliminary interpretations were then sent to each participant for member reflections. During this process participants had the opportunity to determine if the researcher's interpretations of their words within the transcripts were true, accurate, balanced, and respectful (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). However, Smith and McGannon (2017) have recently argued the rigor of member checking procedures, with Thomas (2017) adding further, "there is no evidence that routine member checks enhance the credibility or trustworthiness of qualitative research". Smith and McGannon (2017) highlighted a number of limitations (e.g., epistemological and ontological problems; no possibility of producing theory-free knowledge; researchers have been unable to show how to make contact with the reality). Considering these recent recommendations, it could be argued that the member reflection checking procedures were used as a tool to simply verify what participants said while also offering the opportunity to add any further reflections on the points raised within the interviews. The second step, thick descriptions of extensive participant quotations were included, with the aim of providing the reader with abundant concrete detail that they may come to their own conclusions (Tracy, 2010). These procedures were used to promote individual judgements on the approaches and challenges SPCs face within the real world context of applied sport psychology consultancy (Tracy, 2010).

Results and Discussion

In an effort to avoid repetition, and guided by the emergent categories, the results and discussion sections have been combined. Each of the emergent categories are presented in Tables 1 and 2, and then discussed with supporting participant quotes with the aim of giving detailed insight

into the ethical challenges SPCs have experienced in their applied practice in elite sport and their engagement in monitoring and supervision of applied practice. The terms supervision and peer supervision/support have often been used interchangeably; however, Andersen (1994) stated that the “primary focus in sport psychology supervision is (or should be) the appropriate, ethical and, it is hoped, beneficial delivery of psychological services to the client or clients” (p. 155). Our findings regarding continued supervision allowed the SPC to develop respectability, accountability and quality control (Andersen & Williams-Rice, 1996). With the process of peer supervision/support being explained as “Informal discussions with professional colleagues” (Winstone & Gervis, 2006, p. 507). However, the focus of the current investigation was not to provide further support for defining these constructs, but rather to highlight experienced SPCs perceptions of, and engagement with, the constructs. Therefore, within this investigation the term supervision is used throughout to refer to both the formal supervision and informal peer support processes. To ensure anonymity, participants were identified with “SPC” followed by an assigned number 1 to 10 (e.g., SPC3).

Ethical challenges to practice

SPCs discussed the range of ethical challenges they encountered in their applied practice. As SPC6 highlighted, “There’s a variety of issues [faced by SPCs]. Serious clinical issues, like reporting issues, abuse issues, physical abuse, sexual abuse, as well as recently drug abuse, performance enhancing drugs, and me becoming aware of issues about performance enhancing drugs”. Furthermore, SPC10 highlighted the importance of adhering to, “strong ethical guidelines, that you know the client’s safety, health, welfare, comes first... and you don’t want to use power inappropriately”. SPC1 discussed one such situation, stating;

One situation with a [sport] parent who was basically showing indicators of emotional abuse towards the player. I did actually seek advice from the child protection office for the National Governing Body on that basis as a means of disclosing and logging the information, that this is the information that I have here, it’s up to them how they take it forward.

299 Two categories emerged within SPC discussions on the ethical challenges they encountered in their
 300 practice, these included, (1) Challenges to boundaries; and (2) Communication issues (see Table 1
 301 for an overview).

302 **Challenges to boundaries.** Challenges to boundaries were found to be an issue that all SPCs
 303 had faced during their careers and included: (1) Who is the client?; (2) Relationship boundaries; and
 304 (3) Physical attractiveness and contact with clients.

305 *Who is the client?* SPC discussions highlighted the ethical challenges of identifying who is
 306 the client they are working with. SPC2 provided an insight into the complexity of this issue, by
 307 commenting:

308 The crucial question in all your work, is the ethical issue of who is the client? And that's not
 309 always black and white. But the client is quite definitely not simply the person who pays the
 310 cheque, that the person who pays the cheque it doesn't make them the client. So if I am doing
 311 organisational work then the client is the organisation. If I am doing one to one work then
 312 the client is the person. But sometimes the organisational work involves one to one work, so
 313 who is the client then? I think that is always a difficult issue and you just have to address it up
 314 front.

315 *Relationship boundaries.* SPCs reported facing numerous challenges in maintaining their
 316 boundaries of practice. Research has previously discussed how SPCs working in the relaxed and
 317 informal sports environment, face more unique challenges to their professional relationship
 318 boundaries than their peers working in more traditional applied psychology practices (Brown &
 319 Cogan, 2006). The role of the SPC is complex, and on occasion it is not uncommon for the SPC to be
 320 working alone with a team, individuals within that team, the coach, and the management team
 321 simultaneously; while also travelling, eating and sharing accommodation (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010;
 322 Stapleton et al., 2010). So whose interests are being served? How may this help the client to achieve

323 their goals? What is the potential for client harm in this situation? (Stapleton et al., 2010). It is the
 324 responsibility of the SPC to be self-regulating within their position and ensure that they work to
 325 abide by the principles of their ethical guidelines and boundaries of client confidentiality.

326 SPCs commented on the challenges they had experienced with maintaining ethical
 327 relationship boundaries within their applied practice. SPC8 stated that, “Being too close to athletes.
 328 Especially at the early stage of my career I guess you could easily become a friend with the athletes.
 329 You’re close in age and you show an interest and at one time we just had to say to one another well
 330 we can’t be friends”. A number of SPCs also commented on unethical behaviour they have observed
 331 in the field, “other practitioners that have become too friendly, got too close to athletes... it’s so
 332 unpleasant” (SPC5), while SPC6 commented,

333 Issues of colleagues that I’ve seen doing what I think are unethical things, what’s my
 334 obligation in that situation? Whether it’s improper relationships with athletes or serving your
 335 own interest as a consultant over the interest of the athlete, either through the way you talk
 336 about a situation or not... what do I do in this situation?

337 Despite having clear ethical guidelines from their accrediting/certification bodies, which are
 338 in place to offer greater accountability and protection to the client, it is worrying that a number of
 339 these experienced SPCs had witnessed instances of unethical practices in the field. What processes
 340 are in place to assist SPCs when they see evidence of such practices? How do we ensure ethical
 341 standards are being enforced?

342 Furthermore, SPC7 commented that it is unethical to seek professional gains/benefits from
 343 consulting relationships: for example, “becoming their friend, using them for personal gain...I work
 344 with so and so, here’s my book. Or I work with so and so, you should hire me too. I helped so and
 345 so win the gold medal, I can help you too... I think you want to be aware of taking claim for the
 346 athlete’s success, I think that’s an ethical issue.” Sharp and Hodge (2014) have previously
 347 commented on the positive impact of ‘friendly, but not friends’ behaviour demonstrated by SPCs

towards their clients, which aids the development of the consulting relationship. They argued the need for the effective SPC to be personable and non-intrusive, while also setting clear boundaries for the consulting relationship. However, the behaviour described by SPC7 appears to contravene APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct standard 3.06 which states, “Psychologists refrain from taking on a professional role when personal, scientific, professional, legal, financial or other interests or relationships could reasonably be expected to (1) impair their objectivity, competence or effectiveness in performing their functions as psychologists or (2) expose the person or organization with whom the professional relationship exists to harm or exploitation” (<http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/>). The behaviour also appears to flout AASP’s Code of Ethics Principle D – Respect for People’s Rights and Dignity. Where specifically the SPC does not appear to respect the rights of individuals to privacy, and confidentiality (<https://appliedsportpsych.org/site/assets/files/30025/cmpccandidatehandbook2018-06.pdf>). However, SPC6 offered the following advice; “[you need to] have some clarity about where the relationship will go at the front. Going into the relationship with the end in mind in terms of what you hope can happen. Be clear of your own personal boundaries, how the relationship is going to work”. In addition, Stapleton et al. (2010) recommended that SPCs maintain professional alertness to the development of interactions and relationships to maintain professional boundaries.

Physical attractiveness and contact with clients. SPCs discussed physical contact with clients as another ethical boundary concern. As SPC3 stated,

Sometimes even a male-female you have to be able to put your arm around your client, you know, when there is tears or whatever else is, and say well done, good effort, you couldn’t have done any more, and for that not to be felt inappropriate.

Moreover, SPC7 highlighted the need for SPCs to also be aware of potential physical attraction to clients, stating, “when you work with athletes you work with very beautiful people, so certainly I think it’s useful to be aware of the physical attraction you might feel towards an athlete.”

Previous research within the field of psychotherapy has reported that 87% of psychotherapists, have reported being attracted to their clients (Pope, Keith-Spiegel, & Tabachnick, 1986). The non-traditional working environment of the SPC might also test the ethical boundaries of any SPC. There is a need to be aware of how we feel about the client when working with on the side of a swimming pool, running track or gymnasium where the appropriate dress attire for the client may be minimal. Haberl and Peterson (2006) argue in the non-traditional environment it is essential for the ethical SPC to develop an awareness and insight into their personal feelings and discuss and process these through the supervision process.

Communication issues

These SPCs reported regularly encountering challenges with respect to maintaining ethical communication between clients and their support networks. SPCs discussed two supporting sub-categories; (1) confidentiality; and (2) maintaining open lines of communication.

Confidentiality. SPCs were very clear that, “the key bit about confidentiality is whoever you are working with whether they are the client or not has agreed to the release of confidential information. If they don’t agree to it, even if they are not the client, you are still on ethically dodgy ground if you release information” (SPC2). “My clear responsibility is to work with athletes, and that they know nothing will be revealed to the coach unless we agree that that would be useful.” (SPC8). This provides further context for Gould’s (in Fifer et al., 2008) previous discussion on the importance of maintaining confidentiality. He commented that athletes will test their SPCs to see if they will maintain the boundaries of confidentiality, a process that will help the athlete to develop trust in their SPC.

Working with both individual athletes and the team in which they are a member can create challenges for the SPC. SPC1 reflected that, “it became crystal clear [early in the relationship] that the coaches wanted me to break confidentiality, which obviously I never did, which pissed them off

397 big style. There was always that implicit pressure even when they knew the score about ethics". In
398 such circumstances having clearly set out their limits for communication of information, knowing
399 who the client is, and boundaries of confidentiality to all involved within the team, enables the SPC
400 to maintain their ethical practice.

401 SPCs provided a number of open and honest reflections into the challenges they faced, as SPC3
402 commented:

403 I remember once, an athlete came back to me and said that 'I'd asked you not to say that!'
404 What had happened was I didn't say to the coach that this person had said, I said as I say
405 anonymously it has been said. But the coach put two and two together and unfortunately had
406 four that time, and then did something that was a bit inappropriate. However, the point being
407 that it was traceable back to me and all you can do is put it on the table and apologise
408 basically. And say look I have your best interests at heart. I'm sorry. And then I obviously
409 talked to the coach that instant and we got it sorted you so we knew for future reference,
410 because obviously it compromised my relationship. And it was a mistake. (SPC 3)

411 SPC5 discussed the reality of maintaining confidentiality, stating that;

412 I have one case which was one athlete was ill, and didn't want to tell their coach that she was
413 ill. I encouraged her to tell the doctor, she didn't want to tell the doctor because if she knew
414 that the doctor would tell the coach, which he's obliged to do. But it ended up that she was so
415 sick that she couldn't perform which was a good thing actually, but that was a problem for
416 me because then it was not any danger for her, but she would have affected the performance
417 of the team so that was hard not to tell. Of course, when the coach knows afterwards that I
418 knew they get very upset and I say "well that's how it is". So that was a bit problematic.

419 *Maintaining open lines of communication.* SPCs offered the following suggestions for
 420 maintaining confidentiality, yet enhancing open communication while working within the elite high-
 421 performance environment. SPC1 commented, “I’m certainly the kind of person who will always
 422 maintain confidentiality and have that confidentiality default, but I’m more akin to information being
 423 open and shared with everybody of a performance enhancing nature” (SPC1). “I’m generally fairly
 424 transparent [with information]. If it’s something that I think that we should take to the coach, I’ll ask
 425 the athlete for permission first of all... I try and work with them to take it further forward” (SPC5).
 426 Whatever approach SPCs decide to adopt towards confidentiality in their practice, it is important that
 427 they clearly discuss this issue with their client, and that they gain the client’s consent before planning
 428 what, if any, information will be shared, how this information will be shared, to whom and for what
 429 purpose the information will be shared. SPC10 discussed the process they followed with clients in
 430 the sharing of information;

431 With everybody I ask if I can talk to their coach and debrief their coach, if I’m lucky enough
 432 to work with their coach. But I’ll have a red flag rule. You see a red flag means you don’t
 433 want anybody to know this. So I’ll put [in] a boundary, in that you control our meetings and
 434 the information flow that leaves the meeting, as long as it doesn’t interfere with your health
 435 and well-being (SPC10).

436 However, SPC9 warned that,

437 Even within an organisation I’ve made the mistake sometimes of just mentioning a name
 438 because everybody knows so and so’s hurt. Then somebody would [inform me] even within
 439 our family [organisation] you can’t use names, and it seems so stupid, ‘cause everybody
 440 knows who the hell we’re talking about.

441 The 10 SPCs involved in the current investigation had extensive experience working in elite high
 442 performance settings, yet despite this experience they regularly faced challenges around maintaining

ethical confidential communication between clients and their support networks. Confidentiality is a vital component for the development of trust within the consulting relationship. It is therefore important that SPCs adhere to their accrediting body's guidelines for maintaining confidentiality, while also regularly reminding the athletes they are working with of their agreed upon boundaries of confidentiality.

Engagement and monitoring of applied practice

Four sub-categories emerged in support of this supervision, these included; (1) Supervision is an essential component of applied practice; (2) Supervision enables SPCs to monitor boundaries of applied practice; (3) Supervision is a support system; and (4) Supervision aids SPCs to get to know themselves and care for themselves.

Supervision is essential. These 10 SPCs viewed supervision as “tremendously important” (SPC4), and “tremendously useful, it's priceless, a lifesaver” (SPC7). Furthermore, SPC6 commented that;

I wouldn't want to want to operate without that, because it's too easy to get into trouble if you are completely on your own. Especially I find as I get older, and more experienced in this field it's easy to take the short cut, I'm pretty sure I know exactly what is going on here. Whereas, it's always helpful, when you have to explain it, and someone says “how come you didn't or why not” and those sorts of basic questions that make you stop for a minute and make you go, ok wait a minute maybe I really need to rethink this. And maybe there is a conflict here in terms of my role with the coach, and my role with the athlete. Maybe I need to be careful a little bit about how I am proceeding.

In addition, four SPCs commented on the need for regular contact with a supervisor to be made mandatory. “I think it should be mandatory actually that we have this mentor, this supervisor

466 we go to” (SPC1). SPC5 further explained, “I think we don’t have a good enough structure here in
 467 the UK... It’s the regularity of contact and I think that it should be a mandatory requirement with
 468 real clear guidelines set down but that escapes us completely”. SPC8 highlighted the differences they
 469 found between working as a psychologist and within sport psychology, stating;

470 That’s the difference between being a psychologist and coming from a sport science
 471 background, the psychologists are really trained in that [supervision] and that’s really a huge
 472 part of their training... So we got it [supervision] there, but not as a sport psychology
 473 consultant that’s only when I’ve started cognitive therapy. But we don’t have it yet as part of
 474 the sport psychology program. I think that’s a big deficiency of that program that has to be
 475 part of it.

476 Van Raalte and Andersen (2000) have previously argued that, “Supervision is something
 477 sport psychologists need to be giving and receiving as long as they practice” (p.154). Despite the
 478 extensive knowledge, experience, and flexibility in their approach to their applied practice, the SPCs
 479 within the current investigation continued to engage in the supervision process, as they believed it to
 480 be an essential component of their applied practice -- highlighting that supervision is a career long
 481 process and not simply for those at the early stages of their careers. However, these findings contrast
 482 greatly to the findings of Watson, Zizzi, Etzel, and Lubker (2004) and Winstone and Gervis (2006)
 483 who reported that more than 75% of AASP professional accredited/certified practitioners were not
 484 being formally supervised, and 33% of UK accredited SPCs had never received formal supervision.
 485 More recently McEwan and Tod (2015) commented that the SPCs within their investigation had not
 486 continued to be supervised formally following the completion of training and certification. Despite
 487 the current findings and the fact that supervision is viewed as one of the most important components
 488 in the training of SPCs, the continuation of supervision once training is complete warrants further
 489 research investigation.

490 *Monitor boundaries.* SPCs within the current investigation believed engaging in supervision
 491 enabled them to monitor their boundaries of applied practice. SPC2 discussed the importance of
 492 being, “clear [about] your own personal boundaries, how the relationship is going to work... Make
 493 that more effective whether that’s the confidentiality stuff or how you are going to handle
 494 communication with coaches and team mates”. SPC3 commented that supervision is beneficial as,
 495 “It’s usually to straighten my thinking out. To gain some understanding of boundaries, to work out
 496 what’s important... I’m actually very, very good at taking enormous big complex problems and
 497 going that’s what you need to do... do that and everything will get sorted”. In addition, SPC6
 498 stated, “for me it’s very helpful to talk out and supervision gives me a chance to figure out what I
 499 actually think”. Despite the extensive experience of the SPCs, they noted that, “it’s funny even
 500 though I’ve got a lot of experience I still call on my colleagues for verification of my boundaries
 501 from my own personal perspective” (SPC9). SPC2 further explained;

502 The issue around your boundaries of expertise [is very important]... You frequently end up in
 503 a gray area where you’re saying how much do I know about this, and it’s you they want to
 504 work with, they don’t want you to get somebody else in every time you ask a difficult
 505 question, they want you to help them solve this problem... It’s where you come back to that
 506 motive, if your motive is to help people, and naturally even though you know less about this
 507 than all of these people you could refer to them, you’re confident that they will get more help
 508 from you than all those people.

509 Van Raalte and Andersen (2000) have previously argued that the purpose of supervision is to
 510 “develop competent and ethical practitioners as well as to ensure the care and welfare of athlete-
 511 clients” (p.154). Furthermore, researchers have previously acknowledged that following their initial
 512 training, and as their individual careers progress there is reduced external control, increased client
 513 experience, and individuation of processes; consequently SPCs become more flexible in their applied
 514 practice (Todd, Andersen, & Marchant, 20011). The SPCs within the current investigation believed

515 that engaging in regular supervision helped them to continually monitor their boundaries of practice
 516 and ensured that these were remaining consistently ethical.

517 *Support system.* By engaging in the supervision process SPCs felt that they were supported
 518 by their supervisor, and discussed how a supervisor, “offered perspective... offers reassurance”
 519 (SPC1), while also helping SPCs to “keep my sanity” (SPC5). SPCs observed that “you always find
 520 that as a sport psychologist, you can get quite isolated, I think that’s often the nature of the role. You
 521 are often the link between the management and the athletes” (SPC3); while SPC5 commented that,
 522 “you need it [supervision] for the support, because you’re absorbing so much but also it’s there to
 523 challenge you and up skill you and improve your practice”. Furthermore, SPC5 discussed how they
 524 reached out to their supervisor for support while working away at a training camp;

525 I had [been working with] a coach that would routinely just explode every now and then. He
 526 was never exploding at me, he was just really frustrated, needed to explode at somebody and
 527 I appeared to be the safest source for that. On this particular occasion he was exploding and it
 528 was in a hotel foyer and athletes walked past and I tried to quash it and say “hey look let’s
 529 take this outside” or “let’s talk about this later”, but he kept on and it was just unfair on the
 530 athletes walking past and it was unfair on me to have that happen. I was absolutely fuming
 531 because I had to kind of keep my cool, so I then phoned [supervisor] and had quite an
 532 emotional moment with him, but he was really helpful in just giving me that perspective
 533 again, remembering what I was there to do, and that was really helpful.

534 While self-reliance is an essential skill for all SPCs, resolving personal and professional
 535 problems in isolation can be challenging. SPCs within the current investigation viewed supervision
 536 as a support system where their supervisors and peers was able to provide them with advice and
 537 reassurance. Hays (2006) has previously argued that it is essential that SPCs develop and maintain a
 538 peer culture. She believed it essential that SPCs have a support network of likeminded practitioners

involved in similar work who the SPC can turn to for peer support and supervision. In their examination of sport psychologists sources of social support McCormack et al. (2015) reported informal peer social support as being key for SPCs to maintain their well-being. SPCs within the current investigation viewed supervision as a support system to help provide them with reassurance that what they were doing in their applied practice was effective.

Self-care and awareness. Through the supervision process SPCs reported that they were able “to get to know yourself better to see who you are, why and how you respond, and what you actually do when you are with a client... you get much more self-awareness (SPC8). Self-awareness was believed to be “extremely important to know who you are in that [applied] setting” (SPC5), as one SPC stated;

Perhaps on a similar basis to the way you work with the athletes, [supervision] becomes a mirror in which you see yourself. Through that seeing, you also see opportunities for growth and development. It allows you to have someone who understands which gives you this shared unity, which I think is very powerful. It’s a helpful tool, to have a consultation with someone who is in the field, who understands what it’s like to work at the Olympic Games and how that is so different from working in an office (SPC4).

Researchers have previously highlighted that experienced SPCs regularly engage in self-reflection with their colleagues and clients in order to enhance their professional development (Partington & Orlick, 1991; Simons & Andersen, 1995). Yet Winstone and Gervis (2006) have argued that, “There is no evidence to date that has informed us how sport psychologists develop and maintain their self-awareness in practice” (p.495). The experienced SPCs within the current investigation believed that engaging in supervision served as a safe yet challenging system where they felt supported to engage and develop their self-awareness around their applied practice. The comments of the SPCs involved in the current investigation provide further support for Cropley,

563 Hanton, Miles and Niven (2010) who argued that the process of supported reflective learning helps
 564 SPCs to construct and reconstruct their knowledge based on the experiences they have gained.

565 **Selection of supervisors**

566 When discussing how they selected their supervisors, these SPCs reported that they self-
 567 selected their supervisors from colleagues they trusted and respected, calling on experts as and when
 568 required. Three sub-categories emerged in support of this category; (1) Self-selection, (2) Trusted
 569 and respected colleagues, and (3) Experts when required.

570 *Self-selection.* SPCs reported that selection of supervisors was, “a little bit self-selection. I
 571 trust them, they trust me, they appreciate what I do, I appreciate what they do. But the big one is that
 572 they’re good (SPC10). One SPC commented that the self-selection is based on the development of a
 573 “personal relationship, I think that is part of it. Some colleagues are based internationally and do the
 574 same work and seem to share a similar philosophy, in how you view the work, and the ethical nature
 575 of just their being” (SPC7). The SPCs were self-selecting supervisors they wished to work with who
 576 they believed would help improve their effectiveness. Previous research has highlighted that “those
 577 individuals working within the field of psychology typically favour working with others, generating
 578 and exchanging new ideas, receiving personal feedback and considering situations from various
 579 perspectives” (Tod, 2007, p.103).

580 *Trusted and respected colleagues.* SPCs also reported the need to “trust colleagues” (SPC7),
 581 “I trust them or I respect them. You know the trust is important if you’re reaching out to a colleague
 582 you need to know that they know how it works in terms of confidentiality” (SPC6). The SPCs
 583 within the current investigation had a number of people they turned to for support; as SPC9 stated, “I
 584 trust the wisdom and experience of a number of people, and call on them”. Furthermore, SPC2
 585 reported that, “I actually have a lot people who I can talk stuff through, who make very helpful
 586 comments and ask very helpful questions ... But number one, I have to be able to respect their

587 views; and trust them, number two”. These findings supported those previously reported by Tod et
 588 al., (2011) who reported that for qualified SPCs supervision and collegial interaction with
 589 likeminded colleagues were essential. However, Winstone and Gervis (2006) warned SPCs that
 590 unless both the SPC and their trusted colleague had previous experiences of exploring and sharing
 591 the personal and professional challenges they were facing, it was unlikely that an effective and
 592 supportive supervisory relationship could develop that encouraged open and honest reflective
 593 discussions.

594 *Call on experts as and when required.* SPCs reported that they had a number of individuals
 595 they could turn to when needed, beyond their trusted peers, who had expertise relevant to their
 596 applied practice consulting needs. As SPC10 explained, “I’m looking for somebody smart in that
 597 area, approachable, who also knows me well enough”. SPC9 commented on working with a, “great
 598 group of people who I respect [who] I really like as individuals and I really trust their experiences.
 599 Some are diverse in what they’ve done and not all things are clinical, many are just performance
 600 enhancement based”.

601 I’m lucky enough now I have some friends that are clinicians. I have some friends, so “hey I
 602 think this girl has an eating disorder, how can I find out, how do I approach it, how do I do
 603 it?” You know, “I’m not sure with this client if I’m going off into clinical and I’m not trained,
 604 or counselling, and here’s the situation can you tell me? (SPC10).

605 SPC6 explained how they sought expert support, and stated that;

606 There are some specific cases where somebody has expertise outside of [work place] staff
 607 where I have reached out; ... I have a good colleague and friend who is a specialist in
 608 neuropsychology; so when we are dealing with a lot of concussion issues in one sport and we
 609 were talking of doing pretesting for getting baselines for everybody. For specific input,

610 someone who is really good with eating disorders, [I] would reach out and consult based on
 611 their expertise.

612 The comments from these SPCs highlights their strategy of self-selecting peer
 613 support/supervisors from colleagues and experts they trusted and respected. This finding provided
 614 support for the recommendations from Andersen et al. (2000) who commented on the need to
 615 “cultivate a rich referral network of expert nutritionists, physical therapists...” (p.17). To date there
 616 is limited insight into the supervision process that experienced SPCs engage in post
 617 accreditation/certification and training. However, the current results provide support for the
 618 comments made by Winstone and Gervis (2006) who commented on the need to consider the skills,
 619 training, and personality of any colleague who SPCs are considering engaging with in the
 620 supervision process.

621 When asked what if any advice they would give to SPCs about choosing a supervisor, SPCs
 622 recommended, “Find the best people you can to supervise you, read the best material, come to APA
 623 or AASP depending on your needs. I’m a big believer if you want to be good [then] go work with
 624 somebody good... [But] They’ve got to fit your personality” (SPC10).

625 Have a supervisor who’s honest and... able to really pick on your weak spots as well and not
 626 only be polite but actually be quite good at doing that because I think you need to handle that
 627 as a consultant at the highest level as well. If you want to work with the elite athletes you
 628 need to also be able to handle some of these issues in a good way (SPC8).

629 **Structure of supervision**

630 The structure of the supervision undertaken by the experienced SPCs varied greatly and
 631 included the following supporting sub-categories; (1) Informal; (2) As and when needed; (3) Regular
 632 case base discussions; and (4) Observation of practice.

633 *Informal.* Six SPCs reported that the structure of their work with supervisors was “very
634 informal rather than [in any] formal sense” (SPC1). SPC2 further explained;

635 It’s completely informal. It always starts something like this, either I ring them up, or I see
636 them, and I say “can I just pinch half an hour off you at some point?” And then, when we’ve
637 got it, I say “ok, I just want to get a bit of help with something”. Just talk through whatever it
638 is. And it just happens; I guess they coach me, just like I coach them, that’s what we do.

639 Despite the unstructured nature of the supervision process, SPC7 noted that;

640 It’s on a need basis, but actually it should be structured... because you need your training
641 again when its structured. When you do it on a regular basis it has more of a training factor
642 than when you do it every so often, or just on a needs basis. I think we don’t do enough of
643 that, to be quite frank. So yeah it should be structured a little more.

644 These findings supported similar conclusions from McEwan and Tod (2015) who reported that
645 clinical and counselling psychologists found group reflection sessions regarding their current work
646 with colleagues and peers to be invaluable. However, Winstone and Gervis (2006) offered a word of
647 caution, stating that the whole point of supervision is not just to provide a first aid service when an
648 SPC is struggling, but to provide a rigorous support process that both challenges and develops the
649 SPCs to ensure they are truly effective.

650 *As and when needed.* The informal structure of peer supervision/support links with the sub-
651 category of SPCs engaging in supervision ‘as and when needed’. SPCs noted that;

652 It’s not structured, as in I ring them twice a week but it’s, you know they are there when you
653 want them, and when they want you. They are just on the end of a phone and you know
654 probably once every two or three months, we’ll have a chat and if there is particular issues or
655 if there is something that I have felt uncomfortable with, I perhaps ask for a different

perspective... or that I struggle resolving. Sometimes I reflect on what I have done with people (SPC3).

Regular case-based discussions. In contrast four SPCs discussed engaging in case-based discussions. However, SPC discussions highlighted flexibility around the frequencies of these case discussions, which included, “you know it’s rather frequent... once a week” (SPC9), “Once a month” (SPC8). SPC discussions within supervisions took on, “the structure [of] discussing cases, the good, the bad, and the ugly, so to speak. Sometimes it’s obviously when the crisis situation arrives, then it becomes particularly important to have that network of trusted colleagues to get input and advice” (SPC7). SPC8 explained the frequency and structure of supervision stating;

We meet as colleagues once a month. Actually I have two different groups that I meet with. I meet with my colleagues at the [place of employment] and then I meet with colleagues I was trained with as a cognitive therapist. We also meet once a month and then we can bring videos of ourselves with a client, we discuss it and then we discuss different cases. They’re extremely useful I think to be able to discuss different things you have done and approaches and things you just have experienced in consulting.

Along similar lines SPC6 explained;

We regularly do peer consultation. Essentially when we come up with one case either that’s a serious issue where we need to do due diligence to check in or because we [were] a little shook up by it; ‘cos boy this is a tough one’, or we just a little bit stumped. I can’t imagine doing this work without colleagues I could bounce things off of on a regular basis. And it’s not something that we need to do every week.

However, SPCs reported that maintaining regular, structured supervision was challenging. “[Supervision] happens every couple of weeks as a minimum... and depends what I’ve kind of been

679 working on. The challenges are when you are away a lot and trying to make that happen
 680 [logistically]” (SPC5). In addition, SPC6 discussed;

681 In terms of the specifics of here’s the case, “here’s the situation with this athlete -- what
 682 would you do?”, that’s more irregular. We are trying to get that every single time we meet,
 683 but we find, we should meet every week, but we travel so much it’s hard to coordinate that.

684 These results highlighted that although each of these 10 experienced SPCs engaged with
 685 supervision there was a wide range of supervision structures. These SPCs worked at the elite high-
 686 performance level and one of the demands of working at the elite level is the requirement for
 687 frequent travel with athletes and teams. Finding time to engage in supervision was found to be a
 688 challenge for these 10 SPCs. Previous research has reported similar findings highlighting that time
 689 can be a challenge for SPC engagement in supervision (e.g., Van Raalte & Andersen, 2000).

690 **General Discussion**

691 These results highlighted that despite the extensive experience of these 10 SPCs, and the elite
 692 high-performance level at which they worked, they still encountered regular challenges regarding
 693 their professional boundaries and communication. Furthermore, despite the variety of supervision
 694 structures and the individuals with whom they engaged in supervision, these experienced SPCs
 695 believed that supervision was essential, if not mandatory. To date there is limited discussion in the
 696 sport psychology literature regarding the process of supervision for SPCs once they progress to post-
 697 training and post-accreditation. The current results highlighted that despite the substantial consulting
 698 experience of these 10 SPCs they believed it was essential to engage in supervision to ensure regular
 699 monitoring of their applied practice. Within clinical and counselling psychology formal supervision
 700 is a mandatory requirement for accreditation/certification and continued practice – so the question to
 701 be posed is, should this be the case for those working within applied sport psychology as well? To
 702 date the accrediting/certifying bodies within sport psychology have not provided specific guidelines

for supervision post-training and post-accreditation/certification. Does post-accreditation/certification supervision in sport psychology need to be formalised?; since the informal ‘as and when’ supervision process engaged in by these 10 SPCs the appeared to meet their individual SPC needs? Further research is needed to assist in the development of guidelines for the supervision of SPCs post-training and post-accreditation/certification.

The small, select sample size of 10 SPCs interviewed can be viewed as both a strength and a limitation. The considerable experience level of these SPCs and the elite high-performance level at which they regularly worked was a real strength. Furthermore, the participant’s openness during the interview process highlighted the genuine and authentic responses reported. These SPCs were open about the ethical challenges they had experienced in their applied practice in elite sport, and their engagement in the monitoring and supervision of their applied practice. These honest personal accounts of the ethical challenges faced and the use of supervision to help monitor their practice helps raise the awareness and understanding of supervision for SPCs working at all levels in sport psychology. The majority of SPCs involved were white males, and any future research should investigate any possible gender and ethnicity differences with the ethical challenges faced and potential differences with engagement in the supervision process. However, the results of the current investigation raise awareness for all SPCs working in applied practice of the need to adhere to their ethical guidelines and monitor the effectiveness of their applied practice.

721

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Table 1.
Ethical challenges to practice emergent categories and sub-categories

Categories	Sub-categories
Challenges to boundaries	Who is the client? Relationship boundaries Physical attractiveness and contact with clients
Communication issues	Confidentiality Open communication

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Table 2.

Supervision emergent categories and sub-categories

Categories	Sub-categories
Supervision is essential for applied practice as it enabled SPCs to monitor their practice and get to know themselves and care for themselves.	Supervision is essential Monitor boundaries Support system and provides support Self-Care and awareness
Self-select peer support/supervisors from colleagues they trust and respect.	Self-selection Trusted and Respected colleagues Call on experts as and when required
Variety of supervision structures.	Unstructured and informal As and when needed Regular contact case base discussions Observation of practice